

## Social Issues Committee of the American Society of Human Genetics\*

## Recommendations to the Society

The committee was charged to recommend procedures by which the Society could responsibly exercise its scientific and professional expertise in advising various official bodies, and the public at large, about social issues in which human genetics plays a prominent role. Many members feel that we can hardly evade the responsibility to communicate such advice on important questions. However, scientific and professional communication among its members is the basic purpose of the society and many have expressed their concern about the public advertisement of policy position that would be difficult to authenticate as the considered consensus of the Society as a whole. Furthermore, some of the most important issues to which human geneticists can make important contributions also require a broader range of insight and expertise than automatically follow from our technical qualifications.

For these reasons, we propose that the Society communicate its expert advice through a body already established with broader authority, reputation, and experience in dealing with scientific policy questions. We have in mind specifically the National Academy of Sciences, and its existing Board on Medicine and Committee on Life Sciences and Public Policy.

We propose that the Society establish an Advisory Committee on Public Issues in Human Genetics. This should be a standing committee of 10 members having overlapping terms of 5 years (in the steady state). The initial membership and ensuing vacancies shall be by appointment by the President acting on the advice of the Board of Directors. To facilitate expeditious action by the Committee, a quorum of five members can act for it, and the Committee can establish its own by-laws. The chairman of the Committee will be chosen annually from its members, by the President on the advice of the Board of Directors. The Committee shall keep the Society's officers informed, periodically of its actions, and report to the membership annually at the regular meeting. It is also charged to formulate its own further procedures for informing the membership and responding to their concerns and suggestions.

The Committee shall formulate those public issues that require further study calling for policy recommendations, and transmit these to the Academy as topics for specific studies to be implemented by the Academy. It will also recommend experts qualified to deal with specific technical problems. It will attempt to solicit parallel lines of consultation from other professional societies who share our concerns.

*sponsor* The Committee will also recommend to the Board of Directors means of extending public understanding of controversial issues, ad hoc studies, symposia under society ~~membership~~ and similar activities. It may make public reports on these activities upon authorization by the Board of Directors of the Society. However, it will not issue public statements on its own initiative. Individual members may, of course, do so in their own name.

As a trial example of a proposal, we append a statement on the problems of large-scale screening for metabolic defects in newborn children. This issue clearly deserves the interest of pediatricians and many other groups as well as of human geneticists.

\*Members: Bearn, Childs, Crow, Glass, Graham, Lederberg, Lerner, Motulsky (Chairman), and Neel.